



Watersheds

A watershed is the land that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river or lake and is nature's way of dividing up the landscape. New England includes many eco-systems that, by virtue of their ecological value, recreational value, or proximity to large populations, hold a special significance to us. EPA New England is focusing particular attention and resources on these special places. Working closely with our federal, state and local partners, these community-based initiatives are delivering tangible environmental improvements to these watershed areas.

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Fact Sheet/Spring 2005

South County RI Watersheds



What Makes the South County Watersheds Special?

- They span 300 square miles of four coastal draining watersheds: Narrow River, Pawcatuck River, Salt Ponds and Saugatucket River, with 11 southern RI communities.
- They are remarkably rural and country-like, with high bio-diversity. 85% of RI's globally rare species and 65% of RI's rare and unique natural communities are very sensitive to human disturbance.
- They are the home of the Narragansett Tribe and the highest concentration of turf (sod) farms in the U.S.

Why Do Waters of South County Need Special Attention?

- Development pressures are among the highest in New England. Fragmentation and nonpoint pollution threaten resources, farms, open space and 'country way of life.'
- Stream withdrawals to irrigate golf courses and turf crops may threaten water resources and natural habitats.
- Groundwater supplies 100% of the drinking water and is designated as "sole source" aquifers by EPA.
- Although the region is fairly rural, segments of the Narrow, Saugatucket and Pawcatuck Rivers, do not meet state water quality standards.
- Coastal ponds' water quality, shellfish and eel grass beds are threatened.

Progress/Goals for the Future

What Progress has Been Made?

- 40 acres of eel grass habitat restoration began with dredging the breachway to coastal Ninigret Pond ; a sedimentation basin will be created and dredged sand will replenish eroded RI Sound beaches.
- EPA's Block Island - Green Hill [salt] Pond community wastewater management project is in full implementation. Results show 10% of systems failed or are cesspools.
- Salt Pond Task Force was established to restore Green Hill Pond water quality, shellfishing and fish habitat. TMDL completed and contractor hired to prepare a plan to reduce bacteria and nutrient enrichment.
- Local financial assistance programs for low income families are being developed for septic system repairs and cesspool replacements in Charlestown and S. Kingstown.

What Major Actions are Planned for 2005?

- Complete dredging for 40 acres of eel grass habitat restoration in coastal Ninigret Pond.
- Achieve Town-State collaboration on permitting onsite wastewater systems to improve bacteria and nutrient reduction.
- Salt Pond Task Force and consultants prepare a public draft Restoration Action Plan to improve Green Hill Pond water quality, shellfishing and recreation.
- Complete wastewater management plans for three towns and continue dairy farm improvements.

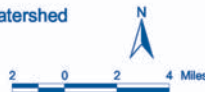
South County RI Watersheds



Legend

- Surface Water
- Rivers
- Washington ("South") County and Pawcatuck Watershed
- State Boundary
- Town Boundary

Data Sources: Political boundaries from RIGIS, CT DEP and MassGIS at 1:24,000. Surface water from USGS at 1:100,000. Watershed boundaries from RIGIS at 1:24,000. February 6, 2001



Watersheds

What are the South County Watershed Organizations and Collaboration?

The RI Rivers Council has designated two watershed councils in the South County region: Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association and the Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition. Along with the Narrow River Preservation Association and the Salt Ponds Coalition, these organizations and partners have each developed action plans that identify key issues and actions. Action teams have been established. For example, in the Salt Ponds region, a group was formed that includes the Salt Ponds Coalition, URI Watershed Watch, GSO, and Cooperative Extension, with RI DEM and EPA New England that will collaborate on focused water quality monitoring.

South County town governments are increasingly engaged in the preservation of their natural resources and their 'country way of life'. Town Council representatives have organized under the Washington County Regional Planning Council to address local resource and land management issues and encourage a regional perspective.

Who are the Partners?

EPA New England • Southern Rhode Island Conservation District • Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association • 14 Towns in Pawcatuck Watershed • Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management • Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection • Rural Lands Coalition • Salt Ponds Coalition • The Nature Conservancy • USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service • US Geologic Survey • URI Cooperative Extension Service • Trout Unlimited • Audubon Society of Rhode Island • Narragansett Indian Tribe • URI Coastal Resources Center • URI Watershed Watch Mashantucket Pequot Tribe • Rhode Island Geographic Information Systems • The Rhode Island Natural History Survey • s Narrow River Preservation Association • Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition

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